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ABSTRACT

Children's bodies are created by the surrounding culture and their bodies, in turn, reproduce the culture. From birth, children are separated from others in the name of scientific rigor, safety, and cultural assimilation. Children move from feeling (trusting their own touching, smelling, and tasting) to seeing, where they recognize that they belong to the world but, at the same time, are not comfortable in it. In many cases, violence to a child's natural curiosity and desire to explore begins with admonitions about and physical reinforcement of acceptable social behavior in the home by the mother. This constraint continues in primary and secondary schools with exhortations, in many cases coming from female teachers, to not fidget and to not talk. Young male adolescents congregate and re-enforce their individual but mutual anger and often direct it toward females. To counter this violence, helpers must both listen attentively and intervene respectfully; helpers and those being helped work together to develop a course of action. Fundamental change of this situation is possible by developing early childhood programs (such as the Servol Parent Outreach Program) which are based in the community, oriented to the parents, and administered by trained teachers. The incorporation of heroes--those women who take total responsibility for their children and those men who are acknowledged, although unofficial, leaders of their communities--as paraprofessionals in the education system could also have a positive influence on young children. (DLH)

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ED 433 912

"IS ONLY A SMALL CHILD"

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE SECOND NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION SCHOOL OF EDUCATION HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES ST. AUGUSTINE CAMPUS 16 – 18 JUNE 1999

BY FR. GERARD PANTIN, CHAIRMAN OF SERVOL LTD.

INTRODUCTION

There is a phrase, much loved and much used by Caribbean parents but which makes my hair stand on end every time I hear it and that phrase is:

"IS ONLY A SMALL CHILD",

It means in summary that when you are dealing with children who are babies or toddlers or even three year olds, you can say anything in their presence, or treat them any old how because they are too young to understand anything about life, because

"IS ONLY A SMALL CHILD".

In this address, I want to give the definitive lie to this statement so dismissive of small children. However, because this view is so entrenched and so pervasive in our society I will begin by examining the end product of the developmental process: the sixteen to nineteen year old male adolescent, an individual who often alarms us, even terrifies us by his behavior.

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To him we cannot say, "is only a small child." The small child has grown up and in many cases we are shocked and horrified at what he has become and how he behaves. So let us begin by looking at the lonely adolescent of today.

THE LONELY ADOLESCENT

One of the best kept secrets in our Caribbean society is that by the time a young man makes the crucial decision to pick up a gun or a knife to do violence to another human being, an incredible amount of violence has been visited on him, by unenlightened or uncaring nurturing practices. Everyone is very much concerned about the alarming upsurge in violent crime perpetrated by adolescents on society but no one appears to be interested in the root causes of such behavior. So let me throw out a few provocative thoughts which, I hope, will stimulate discussion over the next two days.

Over the last twenty years, I have talked to hundreds of adolescents and older people and in most instances I hear the same story:

- "I am so lonely, so empty – I need another
- My life is just the same thing over and over again
- There is no magic, no ecstasy in my life
- I am constantly looking for another, someone to love and someone to love me and, I mean really love me in the way I need to be loved but there is no one
- I seem to end up looking for love in all the wrong places

/No

- No one pays attention to me, no one respects me, no one really considers me important
- If I were to die, no one would miss me
- I have thought of drugs, even suicide but I have seen others go that way and I do not feel that is the answer
- When you have a gun in your hand people really respect you but so many who have tried that end up dead
- So I go from day to day, hoping that something will happen to make me come alive but I keep on asking myself: **IS THIS ALL THERE IS TO LIFE**?
- There is something wrong with me, with people, with the world; there is something missing in our life. What is it? How did it start?

THE LONELINESS STARTS FROM OUR BEGINNING

I do not claim to know the whole answer; but I am absolutely convinced that a great deal of the modern problems of loneliness, alienation, restless searching, and addictiveness, all of which leads to self-inflicted or other inflicted violence, comes from the way we were brought up and treated from the moment of our conception and that it is centered around OUR BODIES, how they were treated and how we were taught to treat them.

/Contrary

Contrary to what a lot of wise and holy people say about how important it is to concentrate on getting our souls, our spirit, in tune with God, I am suggesting that it is even more important to begin with the BODY to make sure we get that straight or else we'll be confused for the rest of our lives.

I will argue, during the course of this paper, that what appears in the bodies of our infant children is created by the culture which surrounds us and it in turn reproduces this culture.

I wish you could attend the self-awareness class which is the center of the Servol Adolescent Development Programme and in which, over a period of 13 weeks we guide our young people towards an answer to the vital question: WHO AM I? Through a process of exhilarating dialogue, we arrive at the realization that we have to begin our exploration from the very start, as a fertilized egg in our mothers' womb. At this early stage, I am confronted by a situation, which will absorb my attention for the rest of my life: the problem of:

I AND THE OTHER

At this early stage the other is the placenta but it is so close to me, so intimately united to me that there is no strain, no tension. It is a beautifully harmonious relationship so that the sense of OTHER is hardly perceived.

/About

About the sixth month in the womb, I slowly begin to perceive that I am not my mother's placenta, that the placenta is OTHER FOR ME. This gives rise to a certain anxiety but this, in itself is not bad, as it prepares me for the world of life where there are lots of other people. It all depends on whether the foetus which is me is experiencing this feeling in an environment that is loving or hostile. Is my mother's blood clean and wholesome or is it saturated with alcohol, nicotine, cocaine, marijuana or the AIDS virus?

BIRTH

This is the first, prolonged, emotional shock that the child receives and it never forgets it. Some psychologists claim that problems of over eating, smoking and alcoholism can be traced back to the fact that the unity of the womb was ruptured in too brutal a fashion; hence the need for investigating "soft" birthing procedures, in which mothers give birth to their child in a tiny swimming pool. It is significant too, that traditionally; the first adult gesture towards the emergent baby is a SLAP! I have always felt that this custom, which is gradually dying out, could only have been instituted by male doctors. I cannot imagine a female doctor advocating that a child should be welcomed into our world by a slap!

Then all those wise and learned doctors and nurses do a simply dreadful thing to me. Convinced that their primary duty is to protect me from infection and ignoring all my signals that what I want is to touch, smell and taste my mother's body, the only

/comforting

comforting familiar thing in this alien new world, they rip me away from her and place me in the sterile atmosphere of a nursery where my pathetic cries are added to the chorus of ten other new born babies who have been similarly treated. The fact that all of this is done in the name of science cannot blind us to the fact that we are inflicting terrible violence on new born children, because we refuse to listen to them. They are telling us quite clearly by their cries and the contortions of their faces that they want to be in close contact with their mother and we smile tolerantly and tell them that for their own good, they must be placed in the company of other unhappy children.

Starting from the moment of birth and during the next three years, the child gradually becomes aware of itself as a separate self. For the baby, the mother's face acts as a mirror and its development during those first three years is closely tied up with the way the child's mind perceives its own body and how comfortable it is with its body. "I am I" is another birth which takes 3 years instead of a few hours and which depends to a very real extent of how comfortable the child is with its body.

IMPORTANCE OF TOUCHING, FEELING, SMELLING, TASTING

The infant is a curious, exploring person and uses its touching, feeling, smelling and tasting senses much more than its sight. The question we have to answer is this:

How do we treat such an infant who

- pulls down tablecloths
- eats grass and dirt

/plays

- plays with its genitals

We "correct" them, we slap them, we tell them "don't touch" and in so doing we do an incredible amount of damage to them, damage that will never be repaired.

Full of parental arrogance, we are convinced that we know what is good for the child; as a result, we very often end up by confusing them, making them unsure of themselves and suspicious and afraid of the world into which they have been catapulted.

For the last fifteen years, I have asked more than 2,000 adolescents in my self-awareness classes: "At what age should you discipline a child?" The vast majority answer: "From birth!" "A child has to learn to wait, that it cannot expect to be fed just because it's hungry, it cannot expect to be cuddled just because it cries." These are the replies that have been embedded in their minds by their own experience of life as well as be seeing how their young brothers and sisters are parented and a shiver runs up my spine every time I hear them. It is true that by the time they have finished their Adolescent Parenting Programme they have very different ideas but I weep for the tens of thousands who will continue the cycle of violence on their unsuspecting offspring.

Because it <u>is</u> violence you know. Whenever we ignore a baby crying in a crib that is violence; whenever we stop children from exploring the world in which they live that is violence; whenever we prevent, however gently, a child from touching that is

/violence

violence. Because we are forcing them to suppress a God-given urge within them at an age when they cannot understand why they are being treated so violently.

The Yequana Indians of Brazil make sure that their babies are in physical contact with the skin of another human being 24 hours a day for the first two years! The result is that these children grow up without the basic split or emptiness in us that is so common to modern man. We moderns spend our lives trying to heal or cope with this emptiness; the Yequanas haven't got it! A lot of our modern preoccupation with "feeling good" through sex and drugs dates back to the fact that the way in which we were brought up didn't give us the opportunity of feeling good about our infant bodies; so we grew up with a void, an emptiness in us which is aching to be filled.

Have you ever noticed how childish men and women are about sex? How childishly eager we have to have an emotional feeling about God? The great physicist Albert Einstein was once asked: what is the most important question being asked by modern man? His reply:

"IS THE UNIVERSE A FRIENDLY ONE?"

Every infant emerging from the womb asks that question; every adolescent struggling to find himself or herself asks that question, every woman whose husband walks out on her or whose children turn to drugs asks that question

"IS THE UNIVERSE A FRIENDLY ONE?"

/The

The Yequana Indians go even further than Einstein. Every Yequana child, because it is kept in close contact, bodily contact, with an adult 24 hours a day for the first two years, not only sees the universe as friendly but feels it to be a LOVING universe.

A friendly universe gazes approvingly at the child.

A loving universe hold the child.

That's where it all begins.

MOVEMENT FROM FEELING TO SEEING

That moment when a child looks in a mirror and understands for the first time clearly and unequivocally that what he is seeing is what other people see when they look at him is a most important moment in the life of the child. It is when he realizes two things:

(a) I belong to the world

(b) I do not feel comfortable with the world

This is a movement from feeling to seeing and it is the heavy price a child has to pay in order to belong to this world. The child is asked to give up his comfortable, trustworthy way of knowing the world (touching, smelling, tasting) and is forced into a sort of play-acting, into agreeing with what parents, teachers and adults say about the world. (Sit up straight! Eat slowly! Don't run so fast! Give us a nice smile! Don't play in dirt! Don't touch your private parts!)

/This

This accounts for much of the rage and pain we carry around that leads to crime, violence and war. Because, whatever we do, and no matter how much we are told that TV and computers are the future of the world, the need to FEEL remains very strong in us. To know and to feel are closely connected even though most teachers don't seem to be aware of it; that's why a child will never learn from a teacher he doesn't like and if small children are not cuddled, they will die.

We enlightened modern citizens of an enlightened modern age are quietly but effectively making a complete mess of the most important thing in life i.e. bringing up small children. That is why so many of our children keep on holding on to teddy bears, old blankets and urine-soaked pillows for comfort. Since adults have no time to touch them and since they play on antiseptic vinyl tiles, they need TRANSITIONAL OBJECTS, toys to negotiate that big split inside of their bodies.

So we grow up needing TRANSITIONAL OBJECTS to get through difficult periods of our lives when we feel so uncomfortable with our bodies and our selves.

- toys
- designer jeans, Reebok sneakers

It all seems pretty harmless, an amusing (rather expensive) fad; until we start to use drugs and sex as transitional objects. It is only then that it dawns on us how broken and vulnerable we are. Did you know that the modern toy is only 200 years old and

/that

that it became extensively used around the same time that children were made to sleep alone?

VIOLENCE IN THE SCHOOLS

If we are fortunate enough to be placed in an early childhood centre with a well-trained teacher, we get a temporary respite from the parental violence of which I have been speaking. Wonder of wonders, we are allowed to play, to touch, to dabble in paint and to thrust our hand into sand and water to an extent that we begin to hope again: "Maybe this world is indeed a friendly place. Maybe the last $2^{1}/2$ years of don't touch, don't cry, don't explore was just a bad dream and this pleasurable educational activity in which we are presently engaged is the real thing'.

Alas! It only lasts for a couple of years and before we know it, we are in primary school and the violence begins all over again. We have to sit quiet side by side (Don't talk! Don't fidget!) and listen as the teacher, who knows everything proceeds to teach us, who are supposed to know nothing; as a result, something very precious, very beautiful, shrivels up inside of us and either dies or goes into a sort of coma.

It is interesting to relate that when members of our evaluation team inquire from primary school teachers how children from the Servol Early Childhood Centres fit into the infant classes of primary schools, as compared to those who have had quality pre-school education, the reply we often get is that they fit in very well except that "they talk so much." Is it not fascinating that a trait that would generally be approved in educational circles is considered a nuisance in primary school!

/It

It is true that for a minority of children who are gifted with good memories and a strong sense of competition and who have parents to urge them on to come first and to beat the other kids, there is a sense of achievement in being at the top of the class and getting into the school of their choice; but the vast majority, particularly those who are gifted with their hands, are put down, suppressed and their self-esteem quietly but efficiently extinguished.

Even though a tiny voice in each child continues to cry out despairingly "I am beautiful! I am creative! I am gifted!", the system, reinforced by parents who are over-anxious for their children to succeed, ruthlessly silences that voice as effectively as if it tied the children's hands and feet with rope and sealed their lips with a gag.

The violence continues apace in secondary school in which the CXC is the goal and teachers are judged by their ability to enable their pupils to succeed in this exam. Some do, even though at the end of it all many of them never want to see another book for the rest of their lives, others do not and we turn them out into society and tell them "We expect you to be creative adult citizens of our society. Forget the fact that we have violently suppressed practically every one of your inner urges from the time you were born; we will give you a stirring speech at graduation and urge you to be caring, sharing, compassionate members of your society."

THE SEEDS OF CRIME AND VIOLENCE

The leaders of our society run around in circles bewailing the levels of crime and violence to which our society has sunk but rarely is any serious effort made to look

/at

at what I have termed "the seeds of crime and violence", to see where it all begins. Let me attempt, very briefly, to throw out a few suggestions as to how it all comes together and I shall do this by inviting you to put together a Trinidadian "Sancoche". I am sure that all Caribbean people know what a Sancoche is. It is the family meal, usually eaten at the end of the week, consisting of thick soup into which all the left-overs of the proceeding six days are mixed together and allowed to simmer for an hour or two: Here is how I envisage the sancoche of crime and violence.

We begin with a pregnant young woman living in a disadvantaged situation. She is filled with anger at being betrayed by her boyfriend who has long since fled the scene and when the baby boy is born she is inclined to take out her anger on the child, particularly if the child happens to resemble the father. The situation worsens if she comes from a fundamentalist God fearing religious background as she feels her mission is to "straighten out" the child and ensure that he does not become like his "good-for-nothing father". The result is that slapping and beating the child becomes commonplace. This is the first ingredient in the sancoche of crime and violence.

The child grows up and goes to school and in most cases does not function well because of the treatment he receives at home, which has engendered in him a great deal of suppressed anger. Since he does not do his lessons well, he is severely punished both verbally and physically by his teacher, who is, in the majority of cases

/a

a woman. As a result his suppressed anger at the world in general and at women in particular increases steadily. This is the second ingredient in the sancoche.

He becomes a stalwart young man with a grudge against the world and particularly, women, and he likes to lime in groups with his friends and attend functions in the savannah in which entertainers on the stage sing songs which are contemptuous of and abusive to women and back up the lyrics with the most explicit and obscene pelvic gyrations until they have the entire crowd of twenty thousand screaming their approval and enjoyment. Psychologists will point out that the phenomenon of mass hysteria, particularly when it is backed up by special effects of loud music, lights and dance, can become an overpowering experience in the mind of most people; this has been clearly established by studies on the rise of fascism in Nazi Germany in the late 1930's. This constitutes the third ingredient in the sancoche.

Is it far fetched to attribute the rise in violence, and in particular the increasing incidence of rape on women, to the nurturing of all the suppressed anger which is present in so many young males, who when they become adults, feel that the future has nothing in store for them?

The point I am trying to make is that if we want to reduce rape, violence and crime in our society, we have to pay attention to the seeds from which they spring.

THE REMEDY FOR THIS CRISIS

The first and most important step we have to take in dealing with the problem is a philosophical one which could serve us as a useful compass during this seminar and

/in

in the years ahead. The approach itself is very simple but you will find that putting it into practice will tax your patience to the limit.

We must begin by acknowledging that practically all adult human beings are infected by a virus which we in Servol have named CULTURAL ARROGANCE. We discovered it in ourselves 29 years ago and have since found out that it is very widespread. Those infected by this pernicious virus are convinced that because they come from a certain society, belong to a certain ethnic group, have benefitted from a certain type of education or have managed to accumulate a fair amount of material wealth, this makes them superior to other people and, in particular, the people they are trying to help.

The result is that they almost never consult, or even listen to, the people who are supposed to benefit from their help and this leads them to overlook the obvious and to make a lot of elementary mistakes.

Is there any hope for these patients who are not even aware that they are sick? After 29 years of working with communities, parents, adolescents and small children, Servol has discovered two vaccines which are very effective and easily affordable. The first is called attentive listening and it means that before trying to help anyone we must listen to them for days, for months, for years, always convinced that what they have to say about themselves is just as important as the brilliant insights and innovative solutions buzzing around in our busy little brains.

/It

It is only when we have got rid of most of our cultural arrogance through attentive listening that we are ready for the second inoculation which we term respectful intervention. If we feel called to interfere in the lives of other people, then let us do so respectfully, recognizing that we are not experts and know-alls and they are not ignoramuses and know-nothings.

Respectful intervention occurs when there is an admission on the part of the helpers that they will never fully understand the problems of those being helped, but, through the listening process, both parties can agree on a course of action in which they have both made a serious input.

THE PHILOSOPHY APPLIED TO CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

If we listen to the cries of the new born babe we would realize that the place for the normal, healthy new born is with its mother. Mothers who were immigrants from Papua, New Guinea to Australia, made such a fuss when nurses tried to take their new born babes from them, that the authorities were forced to listen and now all mothers who so desire, go to sleep happily with their hand resting on the body of the child who is next to them in a crib. Wonder of wonders, the children involved sleep just as peacefully and do not fuss like so many other newborn babies who are separated from their mothers.

/If

If we listened to how relaxed babies are when they are in skin contact with parents, we would encourage the use of slings, which allows a mother to move about without breaking physical contact with their babies.

If we listened to the body language of toddlers who tell us "I have to touch, I have to explore, I have to taste" then perhaps we would not see them as wicked, disobedient children and we would offer them a safe environment in which they can crawl about or stumble about and touch to their hearts' content.

If we looked and listened to children, we would realize, with a shock that a play pen resembles a prison cell, bars and all and we would ask ourselves if locking up children at a young age could have an effect on them that could be a contributing factor to their being locked up in jail as adolescents.

If we listened to primary school children, we would discover that with so few male teachers entering the system, it is now possible for a child to pass through primary school without ever encountering a male teacher. Add to this the fact that an increasing number of these children come from one parent families headed by a woman and the startling conclusion we arrive at is that many children are physically, emotionally and mentally disciplined by females up to the age of twelve. With that in mind why are we surprised at the increase in violent crimes against women from adolescent males who have never had the benefit of a male role model in their early years.

/If

If only we listened to adolescents. If it is one thing that 90% of adolescents complain about it is that

> "no one ever really listens to me; parents say they are listening, teachers say they are listening but we know from their body language, from the way their eyes drift away from me, that they are only going through the motions and waiting patiently for me to stop so that they can tell me about their solution to my problem."

That is why so many adolescents do things that are specifically designed to make parents notice them like wearing outlandish (by adult standards!) clothes, by deliberately speaking in grunts and be inventing music like dub which only adolescents understand and which literally has to be translated for adults.

Finally, we should listen attentively to the research done by behavioural scientists, child psychologists and psychotherapists particularly when they challenge traditional or preconceived ideas. Let us look at a few important conclusions derived from many years of research.

It is generally agreed that so dominant is the influence of home life and early upbringing that it accounts OVERWHELMINGLY for the good or bad character and personality traits of the person. Psychologists and psychiatrists are almost unanimous in admitting that by the age of three the character of the child is substantially shaped and by the age of six, it is fundamentally resistant to change.

/Burton

Burton L. White in his book, THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF LIFE, has this to say:

> "Sometimes when I present my views about the importance of the first three years of life, I notice sad looks coming over the faces of parents. Such sadness is sometimes followed by questions, "Is it all over at three? Is there nothing further I can do to be useful?" Answering these questions is rather difficult for me because to some extent I really believe it is too late after age three." End of quote.

Louise Bates Ames of the Gesell Institute of Child Development in New Haven, Connecticut, confirms White's opinion. In fact this opinion is shared by almost all the experts viz

> THAT BY THE TIME THE CHILD REACHES PRIMARY SCHOOL PERSONALITY AND BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS ARE SO WELL ESTABLISHED THAT SUBSEQUENT SCHOOLING HAS VERY LITTLE EFFECT.

That is why Penelope Leach in her book "WHO CARES", is perfectly consistent in saying that it would be, in the long term, financially and socially profitable to Governments to pay mothers to stay at home and look after their children up to the age of three rather than to build expensive and unsatisfactory day care centres for these same children.

Finally Ainsworth and Bowlby through their extensive work developed the theory of ATTACHMENT PARENTING, the central premise of which is that the responsive mother provides a secure base and fulfills the basic need of the infant to know that its primary caregiver is steady, dependable and there for it.

/PRACTICAL

PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES OF ALL THE ABOVE

From all the above, it would seem self-evident that heavy investment in a National Early Childhood Education Programme would pay handsome dividends. However, let us be absolutely clear on what aspect of the programme we are talking about. When people visit an early childhood programme, they are inevitably captivated by the picture of 3-5 year olds indulging in educational and pleasurable activity.

However, if we are really consistent with all that we have said, it should be clear that we are looking at a group of children who have already been formed characterwise; although the teachers can indeed affirm and confirm what is already present in those children, we must remember that what and who these children are, have already been decided by what has taken place in their homes.

This is why we in SERVOL have been repeating over and over again for almost 29 years,

> *That a high quality early childhood education programme which is community based, parent oriented and administered by trained teachers is the only way to bring about desirable fundamental change in our society.*

The crucial aspect of such a programme is that it permits the teachers to make contact with those adults responsible for the bringing up of children and to influence their child rearing practices positively in such ways, that subsequent groups of

/children

children who enter the school will have benefited from the heightened consciousness of parents and community vis-à-vis child development. In other words the programme aims at having a cumulative effect on parental practices over a period of time.

Through contact with a trained teacher and sharing experiences with each other, parents learn that children can be corrected without being physically punished, that the tendency for small children to touch and explore should be encouraged rather than suppressed, that in these early years children need the constant presence of the same adult figures to give them security, that fruit and vegetables are to be preferred to corn curls or sweets, that kissing a hundred times a day is a must, that should the child be afraid or fall down there must be always someone at hand.

Having said all that, Servol continued to be haunted by the thought that what goes on in the home is far more important that what occurs in even the best run Early Childhood Centre and that by the time the child enters the Centre at the age of $2^1/2$ – 3 years, irreparable damage could have been done within the four walls of the home. In addition, Early Childhood Education programmes tend to be expensive and demand that the community have access to land and a building in which to house the programme. Was it possible to come up with a programme in which trained facilitators could take what has been described as the longest and most difficult step in the world i.e. the step across the threshold of a poor person's house? Six years ago, we took that giant step which has evolved into what we call our PARENT OUTREACH PROGRAMME (POP for short).

/THE

THE PARENT OUT-REACH PROGRAMME

This programme was based on all the research findings already mentioned and was strongly influenced by two additional historical facts: first, parents generally bring up their children in the way they themselves have been parented; if they have experienced abusive parenting they will tend to repeat this pattern of behavior with their children; second, with the steady disintegration of the extended family due to the twin forces of urbanization and industrialization, there has been a steady increase in single parent families (usually female headed) with no support from grandparents, aunts etc.

To initiate this programme, 21 trained ECCE teachers were offered in-depth training in one-to-one encounters with parents. Their mission was to go to the remote villages and ghettos of Trinidad and Tobago and to meet parents by going from house to house, making friends with them and helping them to deal with problems they were having with their small children and life in general.

Subsequent to this, meetings were held with small groups of parents in which they shared common problems and helped each other with possible solutions. In addition, the parents were taught a number of crafts and many became proficient in making marketable items.

The idea behind this is that parents (particularly single parents) were able to stay at home with their small children and earn income at the same time.

/HOW

HOW EFFECTIVE HAS BEEN THIS PROGRAMME?

To say that POP has been enthusiastically received by parents and communities is an understatement. It took a little time for the mothers to welcome these young facilitators into their homes but when they saw them day after day going up and down the streets from house to house they soon dropped their defensiveness and welcomed them into their homes.

The main reason for this is that the facilitators had been carefully trained not to project the image of a "professional" who had all the answers and who had come to share this wisdom with "ignorant parents". Experience has shown that this approach does more harm than good as it lowers the already battered self esteem of parents. Rather, the approach was to praise the parents for what they had already achieved and to convince them that they could solve their own problems, particularly if these were shared with others.

The facilitators quickly discovered that many parents suffered from a sense of isolation, particularly if they were pregnant, and were only too eager to pour out their troubles to the facilitator who by this time had become a trusted friend.

Slowly, parents became convinced that they were indeed the primary educators of their small children and were encouraged to dialogue with the children while cooking and sweeping and above all, to look for alternatives to physical punishment when children were naughty.

Facilitators link up with personnel from Health Centres in the area and are able to give accurate information on subjects like breast feeding, diet and basic sanitation.

/Over

Over the last 12 months, more than 800 parents have been contacted on a regular basis and it is true to say that the 21 young women who walk down the streets of these neighbourhoods each day with the identity card SERVOL POP FACILITATOR pinned to their blouses, are seen as messengers of hope, of encouragement, and of a reminder that parents are not forgotten in their efforts to raise their small children.

The interesting thing is that, like all dynamic programmes, POP continues to evolve. We are now experimenting with the introduction of COMMUNITY PARTNERS. These are women from the villages and townships in which POP has been established, who have internalized the POP parenting programme to a degree that they have been selected to be active partners to the facilitators. Helped by a short but intensive training programme, and further strengthened by working alongside the facilitators for a two year period, the community partners have proven to be very effective in breaking down whatever cultural or social barriers which still exist between the facilitators and the community.

Finally, the POP facilitators are also experimenting with a new, community based day care model. They have found that in every community, there are always a number of women who have a natural instinct for looking after children. It is a relatively simple matter to offer some additional training to these women, help them acquire some additional cots and furniture and to offer their services to their neighbors as day care facilitators for not more than five (5) children. The result is

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that the day care facilitator earns an income, parents are very comfortable with leaving their children with a neighbor who lives in the community and is known to them, and the children may be dropped and picked up at an hour convenient to both parties.

What is most heart warming is to see how many parents have become very successful entrepreneurs in handicraft and other products and that they can accomplish all this while remaining at home and looking after their children.

CONCLUSION: THE NEED FOR HEROES

If you were to ask me what is the single most important thing missing in present day society, I would unhesitatingly say: the presence of heroes and heroines, people who have given their lives to something bigger than themselves. The sad thing about today's society is that people no longer look up to heroes; rather, they idolize celebrities like sportsmen, pop singers or actors and actresses.

It is interesting to note that Otto Rank in his important little book The Myth of the Birth of the Hero declares that everyone is a hero at birth where the child undergoes a tremendous psychological as well as physical transformation from the condition of a little water creature floating in a realm of amniotic fluid into an air-breathing mammal which will ultimately stand upright.

For the ancient Aztecs, who believed in a number of heavens to which peoples' souls would be assigned according to the conditions of their death, the heaven for warriors

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killed in battle was the same for mothers who died in childbirth. This points to the fact that giving birth is definitely a heroic deed in that it is the giving over of oneself to the life of another.

With this in mind, I would like to appeal to our society to recognize two unseen and unsung categories of heroes in our modern Caribbean society.

The first is the mothers of families in general and in particular, single parents, who have the total responsibility for the bringing up of their children. I could spend the next hour telling you some of the most heroic and touching tales of how these women have held their families together under the most difficult of circumstances.

What a tremendous psychological boost it would be for these women if the media focused its attention on their efforts and applauded their valiant deeds. What an important paradigm shift would be brought about if, instead of Miss Universe pageants, we would publicly celebrate the heroic achievements of these females who are largely responsible for holding the fabric of society together.

The second category, would be their male counterparts who are the acknowledged leaders in communities, even though they have never been so recognized by the authorities. Many of them are responsible for holding community steelbands together; others are organizers of sporting competitions for the youth of the area; yet others have refused to allow themselves to be bought over by the politicians of the day, but exercise a vigilant control over the youth of the area. What they all have in

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common is that in areas where adult male role models are sadly lacking, they constitute a lifeline which drags thousands of youth out of the mire of crime and drugs.

For more than twenty years I have been appealing to the educational authorities to incorporate some of these men and women as paraprofessionals in our educational system. They have a lot to teach our youth about life, about survival skills and most importantly they will speak out of their own personal experience, so that it could well be said of them as it was said of Jesus: "His teaching made a deep impression on the people because he taught them with authority and not like their own scribes." (Matthew 7: 28-29)

So perhaps there is no better way to end this paper than by a quotation from the gospel of Mark (10: 13-16):

> "People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to touch them. The disciples turned them away but when Jesus saw this he was indignant and said to them 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs. I tell you solemnly, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' Then he put his arms around them, laid his hands on them and gave them his blessing."

With that in mind, ladies and gentlemen, can we ever dare to say in the future

IS ONLY A LITTLE CHILD?